



Supporting the Troops

By U.S. Sen. John Cornyn

My father spent 31 proud years in the U.S. Air Force. That included four long months interned in a prisoner of war camp after the bomber he piloted was shot down over Germany near the end of World War II.

Like many veterans, my dad didn't talk a great deal about his war experiences. But when he did, it was often to mention how much he and other servicemen appreciated the support they received from people at home. It was a great comfort to him, particularly in the hard days when he was a prisoner.

I was reminded of that recently when I heard a story about another young Texan, Vavette Blevins, who listened to her grandfather talk about World War II, and the support he and his fellow Army troops felt from their fellow Americans. The grandfather said that during a train ride to the Army's First Special Service Force training camp in Montana, local citizens turned out at rail stops with food and coffee to make sure the soldiers never got too hungry.

Those stories stayed with her. And when Blevins returned home to Texas from a tour in Operation Iraqi Freedom, she started an organization to help ensure that her fellow soldiers know they are held in the same esteem as her grandfather.

Blevins, no longer on active duty but now working as a military contractor, created an organization called "Support a Soldier," and it's based at Ft. Hood in Central Texas. Support a Soldier has already sent well over 2,000 care packages to U.S. service men and women abroad – and the number continues to grow. Blevins has recruited Texans to "adopt" more than 200 Texan soldiers deployed in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo and Bahrain.

Across the state, I know countless of our fellow citizens like Blevins are helping Texas service men and women know we appreciate their sacrifices more than they can ever imagine.

We all know that freedom is not free. It must be fought for, and then defended vigorously. Sometimes, force or the threat of force is the only way to achieve a lasting peace. Texans have known this from the very beginnings of the state's history.

It's often been said that "Texas defends America." One in every 10 men and women in uniform call Texas home. We're accustomed to military installations in our communities, and

having soldiers, like my dad, in our families, or living in our neighborhoods.

We're proud of our role in fighting for and defending liberty.

When you stand outside the Alamo in my hometown of San Antonio, or visit the memorial in Goliad, you can't help but marvel at the sacrifices of the brave men who helped achieve the freedom we now enjoy, through sacrifice that we can only imagine.

Across the country, more than 100 formal organizations are showing support for our military families in creative and meaningful ways. We can all do something – from donating frequent flyer miles and phone cards to providing scholarships for military children and care packages for our troops abroad. Or, we can simply write a letter of encouragement. It means a great deal.

Whether the signals we send are big or small, I guarantee they are noticed – and appreciated. I hope everyone will consider doing their part to show our fellow Texans deployed abroad that we all support and appreciate their sacrifices.

Blevins told us she has more soldiers waiting to be adopted than folks signed up to adopt them. If a soldier isn't immediately adopted, she makes a care package on her own and relies on donations to help offset the postage expenses.

No doubt Blevins's grandfather would be proud of her if he could see what she's doing now. I know I am. And her husband, Sergeant Major Lee Blevins of the 4th Infantry Division, would probably be helping her in her endeavors, but he's pretty busy at work these days at Camp Liberty in Baghdad.

Please send Blevins an email at www.supportasoldier.org if you'd like to join her team. Or write to her at Support a Soldier, P. O. Box 5384, Fort Hood, Texas, 76544.

[For more information on the many worthy volunteer activities sponsored by Texans, you can visit the Department of Defense's website, www.Americasupportsyou.mil]

Sen. Cornyn is a member of the following Senate Committees: Armed Services, Judiciary, Budget, Small Business and Entrepreneurship, and Joint Economic. He is also the chairman of the subcommittees on Immigration, Border Security and Citizenship and Emerging Threats and Capabilities.